

I would like to ask a favor of all of you...would you please stand up so I could do a quick poll? All of you who have studied GTMO and feel you have pretty good understanding of what is happening down there; please put your hands out like this to signify you know a lot. Next, those of you who have other interests and have not really wanted to know much about GTMO please put your hands closer together like this to signify you admit you don't much about the place.

Great thank you...now please hold it while I take a quick photo...got it. Now I can tell everyone back at GTMO I got a standing ovation from the American Legion.

Understanding GTMO requires a sense of humor. It is a place misunderstood by most, reviled by many and certainly unique to all others. What will strike you with 24 hours of stepping off the plane at the Naval Air Station is that there is paradox everywhere. We live in Cuba, but never see Cubans. The place looks like a desert, but is surrounded by water. And, in a time of war, we strive to keep our enemy alive and healthy while the enemy strives to kill himself.

When these contradictions are mentioned on the island the answer is always the same...a shrug of the shoulders and "It's Gitmo." Unless of course you are one of the hundreds of Jamaicans who work at GTMO and they say, "Ees Gitmo mon."

Getting back to our mission...

Whenever I am asked about GTMO, I am asked about what I call the 3 c's. The Camps, the Commissions, and Cuba. So, today I will address all three...some with more authority than others.

Let's start with the camps...and the conditions of detention. I believe the best way to do this is to describe to you something called the BUB...or the Battle Update Brief. Now why do we call it that? Well, we know the detainees see the camps as merely an extension of the battlefield. They have their own military leaders, spiritual leaders, forgers, trigger pullers, and facilitators in the camps. Our soldiers and sailors deal with working al-Qaeda cells on a daily basis, and do so admirably.

Anyway, the BUB is a daily briefing...something with which many of you in this audience would be familiar. So let me set the stage...

The BUB takes place in room that is way too small, with no windows, and occasionally smells bad. There is a u-shaped table where the staff sits along the sides. At the end of the table the Admiral and I sit, along with the Camp Commander and the Command Sergeant Major. One by one the cell block NCO's stand up and give a very clinical re-cap of the previous 24 hours. The detainees are referred to by number and their picture flashes on a screen as they are referenced

I will now do by best impression of a typical morning report at the BUB. Obviously, I will not use real names or real detainee numbers. And by the way, when you hear me use the term rec, it is short for recreation.

"Good morning sir, Chief Simmons Camp 6. We have 112 assigned, 112 present. Last night detainee 765 requested onions and parsley on his salad and requested to see the camp commander regarding his request. 844 wants a better detainee newsletter and 632 has requested a Bowflex machine because he says he is not getting enough of an upper body work out.

We had 3 significant activities last night, 601 balled up feces and threw it at the guard hitting him in the chest saying next time he would hit him in the mouth. Next, as 155 was being taken to rec, he bit a guard on the arm until it bled. Detainee was not allowed rec and had comfort items removed. When asked why he did it 155 just laughed. The guard was sent to medical where he is being evaluated. Finally, 767 yelled at female guard saying, ‘I am going to rape you. I am going to rape you. And when I get out of here I am going to kill you and your family.’ Sir, barring any questions, that concludes my report.”

Now I know, many of you think I am making this stuff up or giving into hyperbole...I am not...those are actual quotes from the past few weeks. I want you to know that despite what you hear on TV or read in the papers, the mistreatment and abuse that goes on inside those camps is detainee on guard. And how those young soldiers and sailors put up with this is a testament to their professionalism and discipline.

Now let me give you the aftermath of the BUB...the detainee did not get his Bowflex machine. The guard who was bitten is fine. Meanwhile, I happen to know the female guard who was verbally abused...coincidentally we went to Valley High in Albuquerque NM...albeit about 30 years apart. Now, at least once a week I make it a point to go through the camps and place my eyes on every detainee and talk to the guards. After the briefing, I happen to see this young soldier and said, “I heard you had quite a night last night...are you OK?” She said, “Yes sir, I’m fine.” Now, I looked at her with some skepticism to see if what she were saying was true and do you know what I saw?...she really was fine.

That’s when I knew we were going to win this war. And do you know why, because these young people are like you.

That young soldier was tougher than any terrorist...and ladies and gentlemen I am here to tell you that the generation that is coming up behind us is going to do exactly what you did...they are going to defend this nation and leave it a better place for their children.

And please remember this, were the roles reversed and those guards were in detainee custody...the only consideration they would receive would be a blade to the back of their neck.

Next, let's address the Commissions process. Let me first disqualify myself – I am not a lawyer and do not represent the Office of Military Commissions, which is responsible for charging and trying some of our detainees with war crimes. We at the JTF provide OMC security and logistics support.

With that said, many are comparing the trials of the detainees to the Nuremberg trials that followed World War II. I have done so myself. And while Nuremberg will be the standard by which we are judged...the fact is, there are glaring dissimilarities.

At Nuremberg the hostilities were over. The media coverage was more supportive. The legal environment was certainly less complex. International opinion and critique were of one accord. Geographically everyone was together in one place...and it wasn't on an island.

This is not meant to minimize the work that occurred at Nuremberg...the men and women who prosecuted the Nazis were amazing and we are doing our best to study and learn from their experience.

It's just that our challenges are different.

For example the interface between the command's priorities and the legal community's priorities is an issue we work through almost daily.

If a detainee is shackled in the courtroom, we in the command see security. The legal community meanwhile, sees a presumption of guilt and understandably objects.

When the legal community asks for GTMO's intelligence records, we see the possibility of compromised classified material and the exposure of sources of the intelligence. The lawyers see a chance to strengthen their case either for prosecution or defense. They are just doing their job.

When the attorneys ask for the medical records and the names of the doctors and nurses who treated the detainees, they are trying to determine the validity of the torture charges you hear about incessantly. We at the command see the names of doctors becoming public record and families back home being threatened or hurt by detainee sympathizers.

I want you to know though that we at Joint Task Force GTMO and those in the Office of Military Commissions are working through these issues in a professional manner. Each sees the others' priorities. Each is trying to do the right thing. And, most importantly, each is taking this process very seriously.

Finally Cuba. When many Americans think of GTMO and Cuba they think of Jack Nicholson playing COL Nathan Jessup in "A Few Good Men." Some of us even have some of the lines from the movie memorized. For example, "I eat breakfast 80 yards from 4000 Cubans trained to kill me. So don't for one second think that you're going to come down here, flash a badge, and make me nervous."

And the fact that I have that memorized should tell you that I desperately need a hobby.

The reality is the days of COL Nathan Jessup are long gone.

Every month representatives from the Naval Station meet with Cuban military officials at the Northeast gate (one month on their side, the next month on our side) and talk about the upcoming month's activities. We tell them of our exercises, building projects, and special events. They do the same. We do this so there is no miscalculation by either side about the others' intentions. We occasionally exchange gifts and the meetings are cordial.

I wish I could tell you what is going to happen in Cuba once Fidel (and for that matter) Raul dies. I study as much as I can about Cuba and its current situation because what happens there could certainly affect us at GTMO. I listen to the local Cuban radio shows that originate in Guantanamo City. We all wait, watch and prepare as best we can. The fact is though I have very little visibility of what is going on inside Cuba.

From what I can read and hear in open source documents, the infrastructure in Cuba continues to fail and life is tough and getting tougher. But you already knew that.

What I do know is this...regardless of what happens in Cuba the fact of the matter is that our base there remains of great enduring strategic value. It is the most forward permanent U.S. military base in the Western Hemisphere outside the United States. It supports the Coast Guard in our nation's efforts to interdict illegal trafficking. We have an ongoing mission to repatriate illegal migrants. Beyond this, the JTF has a contingency plan in place to support any mass migration

that may take place similar to that which we saw from Haiti and Cuba in the early and mid 1990s.

Anyway... my time is getting short, so let me close with an analogy that I believe sums up where we are with regard to Guantanamo. It comes from Dave Grossman...a retired colonel and now author. Col Grossman likens part of the American population to sheep...these people are gentle, kind, and nice. They know there is a wolf in the woods, but they really don't want to think about it. It's too scary.

Meanwhile, we in the military (or for that matter those in law enforcement) are like the sheepdog. The sheep know the sheepdog is a necessity, but they really don't like the sheepdog, because like the wolf, the sheepdog is a predator. It has sharp teeth and it, too, will kill. Plus, the sheep dog is a constant reminder that there is a wolf. Thus, they often criticize the sheepdog and wish he would go away. Now when the wolf attacks, all the sheep get behind the sheepdog and say Heeeelllp me-ee, pro-ooo-ootee-ee-ct mee-eee...and the sheepdog will. Now once the danger is over, the passage of time ensures that the sheep will once again diminish the threat of the wolf and begin to feel uncomfortable around the sheepdog and the criticism will begin anew. And so it goes.

My point is this...we at Guantanamo are tasked with defending Americans during a time of war...even if some of those Americans are like the sheep who criticize us. But no matter how much they bleat... whether it is about the conditions of detention, or the Commissions process, or whatever the cause-de-jure happens to be...we will do our duty. We will defend the nation from these dangerous men and will do so the same manner you did...with courage, honor and with integrity.

Honor bound and may God bless all of you.